

Veda Vyasa: Compiler of the Vedas

Vyasa Maharishi is a household name and a central figure in Indian tradition. He is considered the author of the ancient epic, the Mahabharat – the longest poem ever written. But he also plays a very important role in it.

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Veda Vyasa is a household name and a central figure in Indian tradition. He is the author of the ancient epic, the Mahabharat – the longest poem ever written. But he also plays a very important role in it. It is through him that the clan of the Kurus perpetuates. Vyasa's father Parashara was also his Guru, and Veda Vyasa became his disciple at the young age of six. This is a story about this incredible being.

Read in Telugu: [మనకు తెలిసిన మహాభారత కథ గణపతి రచించినది కాదు..!!](#)



Sadhguru: Many thousands of years ago, there was a great sage whose name was Parashara. He was known as Parashara Maharishi, a man of immense knowledge and a realized being. In his time, a situation had come about in society where kings were drunk with power and they no longer respected the dharma of the priestly class. And in many ways, the Brahmins had also fallen on corrupt and bad times, and had lost the reverence and respect they once commanded. Because of this conflict, there was a lot of discord in society.

Parashara took up the movement to bring some coordination between *Brahmatej*, the dharma of the priestly class, and *Kshatratej*, the dharma of the ruling class. He travelled across the country establishing hundreds of ashrams and trying to make contact with the kings of the time so that he could bring some kind of organization between the different sections of society. Because he had taken up this immense task, he was hugely respected and looked up to. At the same time, he naturally made enemies of those who opposed his movement.

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Once, Parashara's ashram was attacked and he was injured to a point where his leg was very badly hurt. He managed to escape somehow, and with great effort got into a boat and made his way to a small island where some fisherfolk lived. Seeing his condition, the fisherfolk took him in. He was placed under the care of Matsyagandhi, the daughter of the tribe's chief. Matsyagandhi means "she who smells like a fish."

Matsyagandhi, who was just a young woman at the time, tended to Parashara's health. She was naturally drawn to him because he was such a towering personality of immense knowledge and wisdom. Parashara stayed with the fisherfolk for over a year while he recovered from his serious injury. Even after recovering from his wound, he was never able to walk straight again.

The Birth of Vyasa

A certain relationship developed between Parashara and Matsyagandhi, and a child was born to her. But by then, Parashara was well enough and he left the village to continue his work. The child who was born was named Krishna Dvaipayana. Krishna was a common name even then. The word "Krishna" literally means "the puller" or "the one who attracts." "Dvaipayana" means "the island born." He was named thus because he was born on an island in the river Yamuna. This child would grow up to become the great sage Vyasa – the author of the Mahabharat.

As Krishna Dvaipayana grew up, right from the time he could speak and understand, he would ask his mother, "Who is my father?" His mother told him fantastic stories about Parashara and about what a great man he was. In her simple way, she tried to ensure that the child was influenced by the father's wisdom and knowledge, and not just by the fisherman community that lived there.

The child grew up with a tremendous awe towards the father he had never seen. All the time, Dvaipayana asked his mother, "Why is father not with us?" The mother would tell the child of the great things his father was doing and that he had to travel because he was sought after everywhere in the country to spread his knowledge and wisdom. Then the boy would ask, "If he cannot be with us, why can't we go with him?" The mother would reply, "He cannot take us with him because he is in many different types of situations and he is constantly traveling."

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Having heard so many stories of what a wonderful man his father was, Krishna Dvaipayana grew up with a great urge to travel with his father. His only goal was to go with his father. He went about telling the children in the fisherman village, "My father knows the stars, he knows the sun, he knows the moon. There is nothing that he does not know." He was not too far off the mark because Parashara was that kind of man.

Then, when Dvaipayana was six years of age, Parashara once again visited the village. This was the boy's dream come true! The six-year-old boy would not sleep a wink that night. He just wanted to sit with his father and know everything that his father knows because his father knew everything, and he wants to know every bit of it too. He asked his father many, many questions and like a sponge, Dvaipayana soaked in everything that his father spoke. His ability to learn and perceive was so tremendous that anything that was uttered once, never had to be repeated to him again at any time in his life. If anything was told to him once, that was it! Parashara was amazed at the boy's capability.

When the time came for Parashara to leave, Dvaipayana said, "I want to go with you."

Parashara said, "You are only six. You are an incredible boy, but you are only six. You cannot travel with me."

Dvaipayana asked him, "Okay, what is it that I can do after two years that I cannot do right now? Tell me."

When Parashara looked at the boy, he could not answer the question because intellectually, the boy was capable of doing what a man of thirty would not be able to do.

Then Parashara said, "You cannot travel with me as my son. I cannot take my son and go around the world. Only my disciples can go with me. My son cannot."

Dvaipayana replied, "Let me become your disciple."

Once again Parashara said, "You are still a child. You are only six. Spend some more time with your mother."

But Dvaipayana was insistent, "Nothing doing, I want to go. You initiate me right now as your disciple. I am coming with you."

So Parashara had no choice. He initiated the six-year-old boy into [*brahmacharya*](#), made him his disciple, and with a shaven head and a begging bowl, this little boy followed his father who had now become his Guru.

Vyasa's brahmacharya

The first day of his brahmacharya, Dvaipayana went out to beg for his food. This little six-year-old boy, with a shaven head and clothes made of wood bark, went out to beg and said, "*Bikshandehi*" in his childish piping voice. People looked at this cute boy and gave him enormous amounts of food. They gave the best things that they could give because they saw the strength in this little boy walking on the street alone and begging food for himself and his Guru.

So much food came to him that he could not carry it all. But as he was going back, he saw many children on the street who, by the look on their faces, had not eaten well for many days. He gave away all the food to them and came back to his Guru with an empty bowl.

Parashara looked at the boy with an empty bowl and asked, "What happened? You did not beg? Or nobody gave you anything? Why have you come with an empty bowl?" Dvaipayana said, "They gave me food but I saw these little boys who had not eaten so I gave away all the food." Parashara looked at him and said, "Okay. That's fine." So Dvaipayana stayed hungry that day.

As Vyasa grew under the tutelage of his father, he displayed an incredible intellectual capability.

Though he was hungry, this six-year-old sat there determined and continued to go through his learning process. This happened day after day and the boy never ate. Vyasa developed this even later in his life that at any time, he never ate unless everyone in the vicinity had eaten. He always ensured that everyone ate, and only if there was something left, he ate. Otherwise he just did not.

When Parashara saw the boy's strength – this six-year-old boy going for three or four days without food and continuing all his duties and study – he saw tremendous possibility and he poured himself out to him. What he would have taught someone in a hundred years, he poured out to this boy in a very short time.

As Vyasa grew under the tutelage of his father, he displayed an incredible intellectual capability. Slowly his learning became such, Parashara noticed that if he taught Dvaipayana one thing, Dvaipayana would come to know ten things that were connected with that. His ability to grasp things from his father became so tremendous because he was so one-pointed towards him. Dvaipayana at a very early age grew into a man of towering intelligence and knowledge. By the time he was sixteen there was no equal to him anywhere; he was that learned.

Veda Vyasa

It was Vyasa who, along with Mahatharvan, another great sage, convinced the community to include the fourth Veda – the Atharvana Veda – on the same level as the other three Vedas. The Atharvana Veda deals with the [occult sciences](#) or the science of manipulating energies to make things happen in the world. The Vedic traditions had rejected this and were not willing to include Atharvana Veda as a part of the sacred four. There were only three [Vedas](#) and the Atharvana Veda was rejected by the larger community because people tended to misuse it. But there was nothing wrong with the science itself. It is the way it is used that matters. Vyasa said the science need not be banned simply because a few people misused it. With that understanding, he made sure that the Atharvana Veda was given the same status as the other three Vedas which were already established as sacred books.

How Vyasa compiled the Vedas

Krishna Dvaipayana not only authored the Mahabharat but also compiled the Vedas. The Vedas were transmitted orally from generation to generation. People understood the significance and [impact of sound](#), so they refused to write it down. Of all the things that we use, the subtlest form of physicality is sound. The next level, including what happens in your brain, is electromagnetic. They did not attach too much importance to thoughts, emotions, and whatever else, but sound was considered significant because it is the subtlest form of physicality, and it can be used to create an immense impact.

The Vedas remained an oral tradition until the time when the rich Gangetic plain was struck by a famine that lasted over 14 years. They say there was not a drop of rain in all those years. Crops dried up, and the civilization of the day wilted away. People forgot to recite the Vedas because they were busy gathering whatever food they could find. They completely forgot their traditions. When once again the rains came, and Vyasa saw the loss that had occurred to that civilization because they had lost the Vedas, he thought it is best to write them down. They were classified into four segments, called Rig Veda, Atharva Veda, Sama Veda, and Yajur Veda. This is the traditional order, not the one people use today. Even today, these four Vedas are considered to be among the greatest documents that humanity has ever created.

Mahabharat as we know it today is only the part that Vaishampayana remembered, not the way Ganapathi had written it down.

The next thing he wanted to do was to compile a great, eternal story that could be relevant to people forever. He told it to two people – one was Vaishampayana, his disciple, who listened in awe. But disciples can distort things. The method of oral transmission through human memory worked in the Satya Yuga when people were of a certain mental caliber. As [Kali Yuga](#) approached, the caliber of the human mind and its memory capacity decreased. Vyasa thought it best not to take any chances, so he hired a god – [Ganapathi](#) – to write down the Vedas.

There was one person writing down, another person only listening. But unfortunately, the written document was so attractive, it was such a grand piece of literature that the gods came and stole it. Mahabharat as we know it today is only the part that Vaishampayana remembered, not the way Ganapathi had written it down. After the war was over, Vaishampayana told the story to emperor

Janamejaya of Hastinapur, who was the second successor of Yudhishtira. What we know today is only a fragment of what Vyasa had spoken.

Editor's Note: Several mystical aspects of Mahabharat are covered by Sadhguru in the DVDs [Karna – The Fate's Child](#), and [Yugas: the tides of time](#).

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